

CLOVER MOUNTAINS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 84,935 acres

The Clover Mountains WSA (NV-050-139) is located in southern Lincoln County, Nevada, approximately twelve miles south of Caliente, Nevada, in the western Clover Mountains. The WSA contains 84,935 acres of BLM land with no split estate lands or private inholdings.

Along the southwest side, from the intersection of Pennsylvania Canyon and Meadow Valley Wash southerly, the boundary is formed by the Union Pacific Railroad tracks or the adjoining access road, whichever is more easterly, except for a tract of private land. At the private land, the boundary is formed by a combination of the private land and the access road. The southern boundary is formed by extending a line easterly from the midline of Section 3, T.8S., R.67E., approximately along a ridgeline, to the approximate center of Section 4, T.8S., R.68E., at map elevation 4,671'. From there the line extends southeasterly, point to point, to the northern slopes of Garden Mountain, thence northerly and easterly across the lower slopes of the Clover Mountains, point to point, to a point about one mile north of Sam's Camp Well. The boundary goes generally northerly and easterly to join the jeep road at East Setting Spring and follows the road up Quaking Aspen Canyon to its junction with the East Pass Road. At this junction, it turns west for some three miles, then forms a broad arc, northwesterly to north, roughly approximating the ridgelines between Sheep and Stokes Flats to the east and the Cottonwood Creek drainage to the west, to a peak mapped as 6,112' adjacent to Stokes Flat. Going point to point from there it extends northerly and westerly through peaks 6,289, 6,192 and 6,445, joining an unnamed jeep trail at its intersection with the range line between R.67 and R.68E and following the trail west to its juncture with the Ella Mountain Road, east-southeast of Ella Mountain Lookout. The ridgeline between Pine Creek and Pennsylvania Canyon is followed south to Peak 6,457' where a canyon bottom is followed, leading to the southwest from the peak, and eventually west to Pennsylvania Canyon. The road in Pennsylvania Canyon is followed, south to the intersection with the access road along the railroad in Meadow Valley Wash. From there south to the point of origin at the north boundary of the private lands, it follows the access road.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 84,875 acres recommended for wilderness

60 acres recommended for nonwilderness

Wilderness designation is recommended for 84,875 acres of public land within the Clover Mountains WSA because the area is natural and provides outstanding opportunities for both solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. **In the preferred alternative analyzed in the FEIS, the bulk of the 770 acres not recommended for wilderness designation were adjacent to the Pennsylvania Mining District and were heavily encumbered by mining claims. Although geochemical analysis did not bear out the claimants optimism, the potential manageability problems attendant in these claims, in concert with the relatively lower wilderness values, were resolved by excluding this area from the wilderness recommendation. Subsequent records checks showed that these claims no longer exist and therefore, an additional 710 acres are now recommended for wilderness.** (Bolded information is included because it was the rationale for the recommendation, however it is no longer accurate. Royal Standard Minerals re-staked these claims in 1996 and plans to conduct exploratory drilling during spring of 1997 in locations outside the WSA). An area of sixty acres in a strip adjacent to the access road and railroad tracks on the WSA's west side remains recommended for nonwilderness uses as in the FEIS.

Conflicts with other resources in the area recommended for wilderness are virtually nonexistent. Grazing use will be allowed to continue. The portion of the WSA not recommended for wilderness, approximately 60 acres, is confined to a narrow strip alongside the railroad and its access road where nonimpairment would be difficult to maintain and the additional space may be needed for realignment and parking for WSA visitors.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: This WSA is substantially natural with minor and localized evidence of man. An historic homesite in Cottonwood Canyon remains along with traces of the flood damaged way into it. Cattle use has broken down streambanks and created trails in Pine and Ash Creeks. The area immediately adjacent to the Pennsylvania Mining District is influenced by moderate activity in the district but the effect is minimized by vegetative and topographic screening.

The area adjacent to the railroad and access road in Meadow Valley Wash is subjected to influences from these features but the effect is minimized by the steep cliffy terrain of the WSA in Meadow Valley Wash. The railroad has conducted emergency maintenance within the Cottonwood Canyon wash nearly 1000 feet inside the WSA in recent years. There is also a cement lining in that wash extending nearly 1300 feet into the WSA which existed prior to 1976 but was not reported in the wilderness inventory. The remainder of the WSA is unaffected by human imprints.

The large drainages included within the unit are very much isolated from external human influences. On the east, extensive heavy stands of pinyon-juniper and incised terrain provide an extremely natural aspect. The remainder of the WSA, on its northwestern side and not recommended for wilderness, is unimpacted by man.

B. Solitude: Opportunities for solitude are outstanding within this WSA. Its large size, lack of narrow protrusions, topographic relief and vegetation all contribute to its solitude. The sharp relief from Meadow Valley Wash eastward into the unit isolates it from the Wash and activities there. In the interior, narrow twisting canyons, cliffs, rock outcrops, peaks, ridges and saddles provide excellent separation within the unit. On the lower region, topographic expression is less but still provides about fifty percent topographic screening. Vegetation is moderate to heavy over much of the unit except in the lower south facing slopes. Screening due to vegetation is strong nearly everywhere except in the lower areas. Secluded spots are easily located almost anywhere in the unit and solitude is rated as outstanding.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities are outstanding due both to the quality and variety of the activities. Day-hiking, backpacking, climbing and scrambling, nature study, photography and horseback riding are all outstanding. Hunting for mule deer is good. The varied topography, vegetation and features create numerous routes, trip lengths and challenges.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The entire WSA and additional areas to complete the watershed are eminently manageable as wilderness for the long term. The area is a solid block of federal land with no inholdings or rights-of-way. No mining claims are present. Some ORVs occasionally penetrate part way up Cottonwood Canyon and thereby gain access to the canyon as well as the southern portion of the WSA, but the railroad tracks preclude all but the most determined from reaching the canyon's mouth. Control is possible for nearly all ORV penetration because of the terrain and vegetation which preclude off-road travel except for some portions of the southern end. All of the area was leased post-FLPMA for oil and gas, but no activity, even seismic data gathering, has taken place and the leases have been terminated.

The area is readily manageable over the long term as wilderness due to its steep bordering terrain and limited number of entry points for vehicles. Some ORV use is evident along the old way in Cottonwood Creek but the presence of the railroad physically controls most of this at the canyon mouth and periodic flooding is reclaiming the wash. The area could be expanded, to provide a more logical and easily identified boundary, by extending the boundary on the northeastern side in the Fife Canyon vicinity and on the northwestern side, to coincide with the watershed divide in both instances. This would greatly enhance manageability of the Cottonwood Creek

area. A limited portion of the area adjacent to the Pennsylvania Mining district may be a little more difficult to manage due to activity on the district, flatter terrain, and because of the proximity of access roads.

4. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

There are no identified mineral resources inside the WSA. Two parts of the WSA have moderate potential for molybdenum. A large portion of the southern part of the WSA area has low mineral resource potential for gold, silver, oil, gas and zeolite mineral resources. A small area outside of and adjacent to the western boundary of the WSA has low potential for gold and silver. Stone, sand and gravel along the Meadow Valley Wash portion of the WSA would have a limited market for use on the railroad and the accompanying access road. There are no oil and gas leases in the WSA as of March 10, 1989 and the area will remain closed to leasing until the wilderness status is determined. **The mining claims located in the northwestern corner of the WSA and for which the boundary of the area recommended for wilderness was adjusted, have been determined "void by law" due to lack of assessment work.** (These claims have since been re-staked.) Mining claims have been filed on the far western side of the WSA in 1986 and 1987 and assessment work was filed September 21, 1988. As of March 10, 1989, there were no other mining claims within the WSA.

Two mining districts lie outside and near the WSA boundary on the northwest and south. Although both had rather limited production, their presence has sparked speculation that similar deposits may be concealed under the thick volcanic cover of the WSA. Claims exist only in a small area on the WSA's western edge. In addition to the previously discussed abandoned claims on the WSA's northwestern side, a large block of molybdenum claims held by a major company was abandoned in the south-central portion of the unit. Available data indicate no marketable mineral deposits are present. The U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 1729-D identifies two areas, one in the northern tip and one in the Coldwater Creek drainage as having moderate potential for molybdenum. Much of the southern portion of the area has low potential for gold, silver, zeolite, oil and gas. Scattered sand, stone, and gravel resources exist with the most readily accessible sites along Meadow Valley Wash and in lower Cottonwood Creek. Due to remoteness, they are of local interest only.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

During formal public review of the draft EIS, a total of 156 written and 5 oral comments specifically addressing this WSA were received. In general, 151 individuals who commented supported more wilderness designation than the preferred alternative, 3 supported the preferred alternative and 7 supported less.

Most comments which specifically mentioned the WSA and supported wilderness designation touch on exceptionally high wilderness values, important wildlife habitat, cultural resource values, significant vegetation, colorful rocks, open basins, narrow canyons and the rare opportunity to preserve all, or nearly all, of a flowing desert stream system. Comments opposing wilderness centered around speculative mineral resource potential and potential impacts to energy and mineral exploration and development. The U.S. Bureau of Mines recommended, in responding to the DEIS, that the border be drawn inward between a mile and three miles along the WSA's western and southwestern boundaries to exclude areas of postulated mineral resources. The EPA noted that the Environmental Consequences chapter should address the water quality impacts for protection of sensitive areas of the Clover Mountain WSA stream.

The State opposed wilderness designation on the basis of its feeling that mineral values were higher than indicated in the DEIS and in the draft FEIS and that management of important mule deer habitat would be precluded by wilderness designation.